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Twenty Paintings

By Twenty Living American Painters

Shown by

The Newark Museum Association

Dec. 1 to 31

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1913

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The Artists and the Paintings

1. Gardner Symons .....Snowy Hillside.
2. Ben Foster .....Breezy Day.
3. Paul Dougherty .....Misty Morning.
4. Martha Walter .....A Break in the Clouds.
5. Guy Rose .....A Normandy Farm.
6. Emil Carlsen .....Woods Interior.
7. Chauncey F. Ryder.....Early April.
8. Charles W. Hawthorne...Boy with Wine.
9. Albert P. Groll.....Navajo Desert.
10. Richard E. Miller.....Reflection.
11. William H. Howe.....Late Afternoon.
12. Charles H. Davies.....In the Connecticut Valley.
13. Arthur B. Davies.....A Flood.
14. Frederic C. Frieseke.....Garden Path.
15. Cecil Chicester.....Madison Square.
16. Elmer L. Mac Rae.....Lumber Schooner.
17. Frederick J. Waugh.....Moonlit Sands.
18. William Sartain .....Moon at Twilight.
19. Carleton Wiggins .....Going to Pasture.
20. W. L. Metcalf.....The Brook in November.

These paintings are secured for exhibition through the kind offices of Mr. R. W. Macbeth, of New York. They are all for sale. Prices upon application at the office.

How to Look at Pictures.

The essay which follows forms a chapter in a very interesting and suggestive book on "The Technique of Painting," by Moreau-Vauthier, published by Heinemann in London, and by G. P. Putnam's Sons, in New York, 1912.

"Every man of the world is learned enough to appreciate the grace of a pretty woman, and yet we do not deign to acquire the easy but indispensable art of seeing pictures." Stendhal was not altogether right when he wrote these words; *indispensable* is true enough; but *easy* is not.

To see a picture properly is difficult. In the first place, all pictures cannot be looked at in the same manner.

But there are two rules which must be observed before every picture: we must forget our own vision, and we must assimilate that of the painter.

Our memory of nature must not be tyrannical. We must renounce our own way of seeing, unless it conforms to that proposed to us; the more we enlarge our sphere of appreciation, the greater will be the sum of our enjoyments. Therefore we must not accept unreservedly the criticisms of painters, who are rarely able to dissociate themselves from their own special manner. Too often approbation from a painter implies the recognition of affinity.* In proof of this, we need only recall the ferocity of the juries of the Salons towards all new methods of painting. They are no more capable of judging them fairly than the veriest Philistine.

To accept the artist's point of view is essential. The spectator must, above all things, bow to the painter's ideal, recognize it, and seek the joys it offers. This should be the preliminary of all criticism.

We must begin by finding out what was the end the artist proposed to attain.

The first glance at a picture from a distance is informing.

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*There are, of course, exceptions. Such artists as Mons. Bonnat and Mons. Degas are eclectic art-lovers, and distinguished connoisseurs.

Even before we grasp the subject or the lines, we see and appreciate the distribution of the colored masses. A true connoisseur, standing in the middle of a room full of pictures, can determine which of the works are worthy of his attention by merely revolving on his heels, without going any nearer to them. Van Eyck's *Virgin* with a Donor, elaborate though it be, reveals itself as well at a distance as Rembrandt's *Philosopher,* a work of equally modest dimensions, but very broad in touch. We feel that we are in the presence of the great, though they differ in quality. Large pictures painted by Velazquez, Titian, Rubens, and Veronese impress us from a distance by their plentitude, their nobility, their solidity of structure, while such a vast canvas as David's *Coronation of Napoleon* fails to satisfy by its masses of color, light and shade. We see at once that it is a work of design and detail.

Let us go nearer. The lines of the composition appear. We recognize it as a literary, historical or plastic picture.

The pleasures of the mind may be combined with those of the eye. Our contemporary painters disdain literary, and even historical subjects. And yet these demand qualities of imagination, of intelligence, and of knowledge. They instruct, illuminate and move us. They are unjustly despised at present.

We must allow the right of the literary or historical picture to follow the rules of its own day. If it dates from the older schools, it is developed like a scene on the stage. In the nineteenth century, it became agitated and dramatic. Now it seizes action and outline like an instantaneous photograph. We must accept the ideal of each age and try to appreciate it: the majesty of the old masters, the emotion of the nineteenth century, the search after truth of our contemporaries.

But whether historical, literary, or plastic, a picture must obey the law of representing people and things, of suggesting realities.

At the distance at which we stand the execution should be apparent. We must seize the moment when the most favorable point of view manifests itself.

Qualities will then be distinguished.

Style, that is to say, nobility in composition and in the interpretation of form, as shown by Raphael. (I cite the name most expressive of the quality.)

Design, a scholarly accomplishment if we take it prosaically, as the worship of contour, a supreme gift, if we see in it the sense of form and gesture of a Michelangelo.

Color, which must not be confounded with colors, and looked for in vivacity of tone. It flourishes in the happy combinations which give at once brilliance and delicacy (Titian, Veronese).

Values, that is to say, the exact rendering of light and shadow in their reciprocal relations, irrespective of their coloring, an essential quality which is the very structure and framework of a painting, a quality of such importance that some painters have made it the whole of a picture, and have relied on it alone (Rembrandt).

Vigor and insistence on form, which is emphasized with a haughty harshness among the Primitives (Mantegna).

Homogeneity, flexibility of contour, softness in the transitions from one external form to another, purely technical qualities in which the Dutch and the Flemings have excelled.

Atmosphere, the relation between near and distant objects, the imitation of the ambient air, a quality which has become such an obsession among our contemporaries that it has often been exaggerated; persons and things have been shrouded in mists and vapors (Corot).

To these qualities, the most frequent or the greatest, many others more material may be added: *Brio* in dexterous craftsmanship, and liberty of handling, technical qualities much sought after for the last hundred years, freshness of manner and tone, one of the qualities appreciated by our moderns to such an extent that they are content with this alone.

As these beauties and graces are rarely combined, and as certain of them even exclude others, we need not be surprised if we sometimes find but one of them. Ingres thought only of line, Delacroix of color and expression, Carriere of values.

As we come nearer to it, the picture painted with great regard for detail reveals its qualities of material perfection and of precision. We must admit that very often it makes a bad impression from a distance; its elaborate execution causes the over-abundant half-tones to become too dark, and to obscure and sully the modellings when we look at them from a distance; they only make their full effect when the spectator is near the canvas.*

We have now come very near. The highly finished picture asserts its claim to respect and attention. But whatever a picture may be, if it is well painted, close examination of it is extremely interesting. Such examination reveals its handling, its technique, the manner in which the artist attacked its various portions, and produced the illusion which charms us at a distance. Disregard the injunction of the flock of sheep who tell you to "look at it from a distance," and go close. The highly finished picture will gain from your approach, and the broadly painted one will lose nothing. You will see the scenery from the wings, after having admired it from the front.

The interest of such examination will not, perhaps, reveal itself at once to a person who has never handled a brush; but the comparison of handlings, and of the results obtained in the effect, will train the spectator's eye by degrees, and he will end by discovering a peculiar attraction in the process, and one full of variety, in these days of technical improvisation; old painting yields its secrets less freely, and is more difficult for the uninitiated to understand.

When this close examination is over, it is well to take up a position at the most favorable point of view, and to carry away the remembrance of it.

If we have the power of evoking, and renewing images in our minds, the admired passages will re-appear later. They will have become "a joy forever."

Here is a final word of advice to picture-lovers.

*Painters who work at very close quarters to their canvases are not sufficiently alive to this danger. Hébert, like Reynolds before him, uses very long brushes, which enable him to lay on the paint at some distance from the canvas.

As the best way of seeing a picture properly is to isolate it, as two pictures hung side by side are nearly always mutually destructive, as to find two which enhance each other's beauties is as rare as it is difficult, as museums and exhibitions realize the very worst and least artistic methods of displaying pictures, we need never be surprised to find that a picture we have thought charming in a room or a studio should have become insignificant in an exhibition, nor that an essentially vulgar work should make a good effect in a gallery. Let the picture-lover hold to his first opinion;* let him say to himself that some pictures, like some women, are at their best in an intimate tête-à-tête; let him remember never to hang pictures closely together. The farther apart they are, the better they will speak to us.

*He must also remember that the eye has its "bad days," like the temper, when the best painting will seem insipid.